

Pamela Manuel has been selected as the 2016 Tohono O’odham Nation First Things First Champion for Young Children.

The award is given to local champions who actively volunteer their time to raise public awareness of the importance of early childhood development and health. Champions spend a significant amount of time volunteering with FTF and building public awareness about the importance of early childhood issues.



Manuel engaged in awareness-raising efforts such as:

- Leading a community baby shower, where new mothers learn about early childhood resources in their area and topics that will help to enrichen their baby’s development, along with receiving new baby clothes.
- Engaging new mothers to listen to the importance of early literacy and reading to your baby starting at birth from an FTF representative.
- Providing parent kits to families who visit the San Simon Health Center in Sells.

We recently caught up with Manuel, who is a Social Work Associate at the San Simon Health Center in Sells.

Question: Why do you feel early childhood development and health is so important?

Answer: Because the first year of a child’s life is very important, it shapes their future, not just in school but life in general.

Q: What caused you to get involved in efforts to increase public awareness in early childhood issues?

A: We started holding baby showers at the health center for our pregnant mothers and we wanted someone to come and talk to them about the importance of keeping their baby healthy and the importance of reading to their children. It has been a real success and we’ve had four baby showers so far. It is a day of fun and education on various baby/mommy topics.

Q: Why do you feel building awareness in early childhood and developmental health is so important for families and communities?

A: If we have children who are read to in their early years, the community will have children who will not struggle in school and eventually become successful adults.

Q: How have you seen awareness for the early years change in your community?

A: More kids are getting reading awards in the local schools and more kids are being recommended to the talented and gifted program.

Q: How do you suggest other people in your community get involved?

A: I am constantly telling everyone to read to your children more, especially when they are small. Designate some time to do things with the children like playing educational games or reading. I like to play scrabble with my grandsons. I do this at community meetings, community functions or when I am visiting with my patients in the clinic.